

"6,000,000 Licensed Listeners Before Christmas"

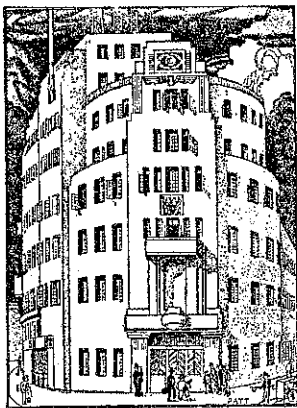
British Broadcasting Corporation, Colossus of the Radio World, Sets Itself a Goal--and Celebrates a Birthday

IT is only 13 years since the lonely listeners for SOS messages were startled by a few chords of music replacing the interminable dots and dashes, and what strides telephonic broadcasting has made in those few short years! Shortly after that epoch-marking day the engineers at a British Government commercial station with a rude microphone, and Dame Nellie Melba as conspirator, impressed speech and song upon the station's carrier-wave and brought official admonishment for making foolish a wonderful scientific invention. But telephonic broadcasting was launched!

There is a tendency to assume that Britain lags behind in matters of progress, but as far as broadcasting is concerned it is pleasing to be able to record the fact that the British Broadcasting Company was the first organisation in Europe to transmit regular daily broadcasting programmes. Actually, although the B.B.C. celebrates its eleventh birthday on Tuesday, these had been broadcasting of a more or less spasmodic nature for some two years previously.

By 1922 it was apparent that broadcasting was not a mere hobby, or a possibly popular form of cheap entertainment, but was the greatest power for good, or evil, vouchsafed to Man since the invention of printing. It was recognised that it had no frontiers, that it was a marvellous channel of communication between nations, and a means of interpreting the peoples of the world to each other. It was the recognition of these facts that led to the adoption of the B.B.C. motto, "Nation shall speak peace unto nation."

The initial problem with which the company was confronted was to define a policy for the future of broadcasting. But in 1921-1922 even a general idea was difficult to formulate. The situation was that broadcasting, hitherto practised for the love of the thing by a few scientific amateurs, had leaped into considerable popularity in the United States, and was spreading to Europe under the impulsion of some urge that might be either a whim of the moment or the sign of a real society necessity. In America the pace of the movement had been too hot for careful thought and planning, with the result that six hundred stations were in existence by the end of 1922. Although the first important and sensational broadcast had been one of political news, and educational broadcasting of a sort was done as early as 1921, the field was at once captured by forces whose demands the radio trade set itself to cater for on purely commercial lines.



The license granted to the original company was for four years and was due to expire on December 31, 1926. During these four years the British Broadcasting system had developed along sound lines, and was already looked upon by other nations as a model to be copied. Representatives from many countries journeyed to Savoy Hill to study British methods, many of which have been adopted. It was in those early days that radio links were forged with foreign countries which have endured to this day.

With the astounding success achieved, it was realised that such an instrument in the hands of a commercial company was a menace. An organisation controlling broadcasting could, and yet may, control a country. A new policy was desirable.

In 1925 the House of Commons set up a committee to report on the whole broadcasting position in Britain, with a view to deciding the proper course to pursue when the company's license expired on December 31, 1926. As was generally anticipated this committee reported in favour of a national broadcasting authority taking over the staff, system, and plant as a going concern. This was effected on January 1, 1927, when the "corporation" replaced the "company."

This decision was of fundamental importance not only for British Broadcasting, but for European practice in general. It marked the intention to make broadcasting, as a public service, subserve a public need. What precisely that need was would presumably emerge from experience. Meantime the management would be in the hands of a board with a chairman appointed by the Government, and the other directors by the wireless manufacturers.

Development has been phenomenal even in this age of miracles. Replacements of low-powered transmitters with giants of 100 kilowatts and 50 kilowatts that give crystal reception for hundreds of miles, the super-power Empire station that gives wonderful service in some areas, and the erection of Broadcasting House that has been facetiously described as the "Petrified Dreadnought" are developments known to all. With orchestras unsurpassed anywhere in the world and a revenue that permits engagements of celebrities at 300 guineas an appearance, the B.B.C. with its new slogan, "6,000,000 licensed listeners before Christmas," is a colossus that compels admiration. It is the Atlas of the broadcasting world, and all the earth wishes it many happy returns of the day.

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"RUMBA," a story of Cuba to-day, has been purchased by Paramount as a possible starring picture for George Raft. The author is Guy Endor, and the locale is Havana as the tourist knows it.

MIRIAM HOPKINS could serve a present-day Da Vinci as a model for a modern Mona Lisa, according to Jean Negulesco, noted Rumanian painter now in Hollywood. The artist, who watched Miss Hopkins in a scene for Paramount's "Design for Living," with Gary Cooper and Fredric March, and with Ernst Lubitsch directing, said: "Although she is a natural blonde, that would matter little. She has the two main essentials—a mysterious smile and dark eyes."

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